

What is a British Moth?

By A. A. ALLEN*

In recent issue of the *Proc. Brit. Ent. Nat. Hist. Soc.* (March 1980, p. 57), it is stated in the report of a meeting of the Society that the Ministry of Agriculture had begun publishing lists of moths intercepted by Customs officials in cargoes, etc., in 1976-77, and that a similar list for 1978 was expected; and that Mr. R. F. Bretherton, the author of the communication, was considering the need to include these in the list of British Lepidoptera.

There is no question, of course, that the publication of such lists, whereby they become available to our lepidopterists and collectors, is a welcome step. But it seems to me that before any final decision on the above proposal is made, more thought should be given to the desirability (?) of granting British status to a host of obviously exotic species having nothing to do with our fauna properly speaking. For my part I cannot think that the indiscriminate inclusion of such species as British serves any good or useful purpose. If they are to be admitted to our lists at all, they should, in my opinion, be kept apart — e.g., relegated to an appendix of imported species, as I believe used often to be done. In the body of the list, mingling with the genuine "Britishers", they are an intrusive irrelevance. In these days of ever-increasing international traffic, this class if admitted can only continue to swell and clutter up our faunal lists to a degree ultimately intolerable.

I need hardly add that such considerations apply solely to species not known to breed in this country in a state of nature. As soon as any of them are found to do so, such species merge with and become in effect part of the wild fauna, thereby earning their right to full British "nationality".

A fauna consists basically of three elements: natives or indigenes, *established* aliens, and spontaneous immigrants. Of course there will always be species of uncertain status, whose entitlement to be treated as members of the fauna must remain doubtful. Such may legitimately be given the benefit of the doubt; provided, however, that what is known of the insect's natural range and habits does not suggest that the occurrence in question is likely to remain unique or nearly so, and that the probability of its being due to introduction, whether accidental or deliberate, is overwhelming.

Naturally, these borderline cases will be most numerous in an Order such as the Lepidoptera, where so many species are migratory in varying degrees. Yet I do not think that the problem of what to do with them justifies the policy of including everything right across the board. It is manifestly impossible to exclude all arbitrary procedures in what is, after all, a compromise between convenience and an attempt

* 49 Montcalm Road, Charlton, London, SE7 8QG.

to represent the actual state of affairs. The principles outlined here are equally applicable to other Orders (cf. Allen, 1964, *Ent. mon. Mag.*, **100**: 278). The question, I think, merits wider discussion.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE SCARCE CHOCOLATE TIP: *CLOSTERA ANACHORETA* D. & S. — Following the capture at Dungeness, Kent of two immigrant (?) specimens of *Clostera anachoreta* D. & S., Scarce Chocolate Tip (one in 1974 by W. L. Coster, and one in 1978 by E. H. Wild) considerable hopes were aroused that the insect might possibly breed in the area.

Many individual searches were made culminating in the British Entomological and Natural History Society Field Meeting on the site on 29th September, 1979. By the end of the year a number of imagines and larvae had been discovered resulting in a considerable quantity of moths being reared and bred therefrom.

I was fortunate in finding six larvae on willow which were reared without difficulty for the cabinet. Later, I was indebted to Mr. Richard Fairclough who gave me a batch of some 40 ova from his successful breeding. All produced perfect insects with prompt pairings and resultant ova. Breeding these on through two further generations resulted in a huge quantity of larvae taking a great deal of time and energy to feed and maintain in first rate hygienic conditions.

My idea in rearing so many insects was to return them to Dungeness in the hope that this attractive species will make a substantial lodgement that will persist despite the vagaries of our climate; such as has been achieved by *Calophasia lunula* Hufn. Toadflax Brocade on the same site. On 6th Sept. 1980 I made a special trip to Dungeness and deposited on the willows between 8,000 and 10,000 second and third instar larvae. This by itself was a most tedious undertaking but at last my home was restored to some normality.

The moth seems to be particularly constant and free from any substantial aberrational tendencies so that I imagine a short series will suffice for most collectors. Let me, therefore, appeal to others to release any surplus insects from their breeding stocks on the *original* site to give the species as much chance as possible to gain a firm foothold. Perhaps the most damaging prospect will be the hymenopterous parasites which attack the young larvae of *Euproctis chrysorrhoea* L., Brown-Tail Moth and *Leucoma salicis* L., White Satin Moth, both of which feed on willow and which, in the early stage, bear some resemblance to *anachoreta*. If this plea is heeded and we are successful then we may well benefit in another way. I continue to smart, as do many of us, from well-meaning but ill-informed criticism of the collector entomologist to the effect that we are despoilers and not protectors of animal life. It would be nice to nail the lie by pointing to a successful conservation by "collectors". — K. G. W. EVANS, 31 Havelock Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6QQ, 7.ix.1980.